

IT'S APRIL IN LAMORINDA FOR REAL ESTATE



Consistently Representing Buyers and Sellers in Successful Transactions
Buy • Sell • Live • Lamorinda

925-253-2147
aprilmat@comcast.net



Giving Dreams an Address

April Matthews www.villageassociates.com • www.dreamhomelamorinda.com

The Tick Tock Store

We Make House Calls On Grandfather Clocks!

The Right Place For The Right Time
Batteries • Bands • Repair

FREE Estimates
Rolex-Tag Heuer Repair Center
Specialize in grandfather clock and watch repairs

925-952-4488 www.TheTickTockStore.com

1547-A Palos Verdes Mall, Walnut Creek
(In Lunardi's Center, behind UPS Store)

\$1 OFF Watch Battery With This Coupon

A New Chapter in Kids' Bookstores Opens its Doors in Lafayette

By Lou Fancher



Daniel and Michele Collier with children Quinn, Chase and Bean came by on opening day at Bel and Bunna's. Behind the counter are Sam Nicholson and owner Clare McNeill. Photo Andy Scheck

Sometimes going out on a limb is the smartest way to go. Embracing her wildest dreams with both eyes open, Clare McNeill launched Bel & Bunna's Books, an independently owned and operated children's bookstore in downtown Lafayette.

Sawdust disappearing just three days prior to the May 28 opening had the 46-year-old Walnut Creek resident beaming like the store's logo, a red-headed roughly 9-year-old version of McNeill created by designer Olga Larner.

"It's insane, in a world where people buy everything from Amazon, why do a bricks-and-mortar bookstore?" she asks.

Of course, McNeill is anything but insane. Arriving from the U.K. where she ran everything from IT companies and startups to a 150-year-old church building and community center, McNeill was until June 2015 the Director of Finance and Administration at Incapture Technologies LLC in San Francisco. The company at its peak had 80 employees and leaving it, she says, "I gave up a big salary, trust me."

But she didn't give up the savvy that put her in charge of a financial services company. Case in point: her co-investor, Anthony D'Silva, managing director of Incu Global, a capital management firm. "He heard I was looking for an investor at a social event on a Friday. He came over that Sunday and looked at my business plan and said, 'I'm in.' He knows we're not in this to make millions. We're in it to get one child to read one book and

maybe, help him or her to have a life for the better."

D'Silva, according to McNeill, operates rather like a rough washcloth, whisking away the layers to ask "Why do you need it?" for each line item on the store's budget.

"You have to meet the bottom line," she says. "You have to offer something the customer wants. You have to give them the value added things: the book clubs, author readings, Saturday morning events and such."

A children's bookstore owner must also arrive with fondness for books and reading and a love for spending time with children. McNeill was born in London to Scottish parents: her mother was a preschool teacher who encouraged McNeill and her younger brother to read. "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland" was a favorite, but so too were books by Roald Dahl and Enid Blyton; English artist Mary Tourtel's "Rupert the Bear" comic strips, fairy tales and more.

"My father had a tiny room he called 'the library.' It was floor to ceiling with books. He read anything. I recall him reading to my brother and me lists of people who died at the Battle of Culloden (a battle in the Scottish Highlands)."

Today, the mother of 13-year-old James Moore and Joseph Moore, age 9, brings her boys home from their enthusiastic karate exercises at East West Kung Fu in Alamo to read the "Jedi Academy Series," "The Lord of The Rings," the Alex Rider books or "The Art of War" by Sun Tzu. "James, give him a book, he inhales it. Joseph, he

asks why read 'The Hobbit' when you can watch it on television? I encourage him to read what he wants to read. There's nothing worse than being told what to read."

By allowing the same sponta-

neity of choice that had her selecting a friend's suggestion for the store's name — a compilation of her nickname, "Bel," and the name of her younger son's stuffed rabbit, "Bunna"— McNeill says, "It makes reading and books more personal if it's more personal for me and for them."

Until mid-June when a college student on summer break will lend assistance, McNeill will operate the store seven days a week by herself. Working from 10-6 Monday to Saturday and 12-5 Sunday and holidays sounds like a tall order — until it's compared to preparing and opening Bel and Bunna's.

"Doing this was nothing like what I'm used to. Dealing with the city, the county, the paperwork — everything costs money — it was far more than I expected. People have no idea that opening a retail business is harder than starting an IT." McNeill says she learned early on how to handle her frustration. "There was no point in my being cross with people. If you're kind,

you'll find people are prepared to help."

Bel and Bunna's will not be a "Storyteller Two," a pale imitation of the beloved Storyteller Bookstore owned, founded and closed due to retirement in 2015 by Linda Higham. Although Storyteller's popular offerings will be true of McNeill's store — quality books, classic toys, a summer reading program, an approachable, warm owner and other specialties — a better location (near Paxti's in the shop that formerly housed Floret) is just one improvement. Promises of adventurous ways to choose books and McNeill's plan to write to every child who registers at the store add allure. "I want it to be fun to come read stories with Bel. I'm a viable alternative to an iPad. The struggle to put books in kids' hands is real, but I don't think it's out of reach."

Lamorinda Weekly business articles are intended to inform the community about local business activities, not to endorse a particular company, product or service.

business briefs

Anthony Ma Named Moraga Employee of the Month for May



From left: Chamber Vice-President Bob Fritzky, 24 Hour Fitness Manager Patrick Russell, Anthony Ma, Rotary President Roger Gregory Photo provided

Anthony Ma, Master Personal Trainer at 24-Hour Fitness, has been named the Moraga Employee of the Month for May.

Ma is one of the longest tenured employees at the gym and personally trains over 40 clients each week, helping them with their fitness and health. His training skills make him one of the most popular trainers and is noted for his attention to detail and work effort "Anthony is a fixture at 24 Hour Fitness," said Patrick Russell, the club's manager. "He's been here over six years and his clients really love him as he has almost no attrition. He has mostly long-term clients and he has helped change their lives dramatically, making them more fit and healthy."

In winning the award, the Moraga Rotary and Chamber of Commerce will award Ma a gift card to Safeway as well as a gift card to a local restaurant. Ma was presented with his award and gifts at the May 31 Moraga Rotary lunch at Saint Mary's College

Coldwell Banker Residential Brokerage in Orinda is located at 5 Moraga Way and can be reached at 925-253-4600.

GRAZE Honored by Baker



Photo provided

Assemblywoman Catharine Baker (R-San Ramon) has recognized GRAZE Food Bar in Moraga as the 16th Assembly District's Small Business of the Month for the month of May.

"Since opening last year, GRAZE Food Bar has quickly become a local favorite for its fresh, delicious food and casual dining experience, and as a small, family-owned business, GRAZE Food Bar is an important contributor to our local community and economy," said Assemblywoman Baker.

GRAZE Food Bar describes itself as a casual, counter order café serving quick, simple, and delicious food, with a commitment to proving its customers a quality product at an affordable price.

Sindeo Names Orinda Resident Deepak Kumar as COO/CFO

Sindeo, the modern mortgage marketplace, recently announced its newest executive hire, Deepak Kumar, who will assume the role of COO/CFO. Kumar is an accomplished business executive with over 20 years' experience leading teams to high-growth business success, most recently as Fannie Mae's Senior Executive and VP, Client Management. He lives in Orinda.

From the Chambers:

Mix and mingle at the Orinda Chamber Mixer from 4:30 to 6:30 p.m. on Thursday, June 23 at Sutter Urgent Care, 12 Encino Caminas, in Orinda. For more info, visit the Chamber website at www.orindachamber.org.

Learn a bit about business teamwork at the Moraga Chamber of Commerce's monthly mixer from 3 to 5 p.m. Friday, June 24, at Saint Mary's College. Hear about the school's five-year plan and tour the Sports Center Fillipi Hall.

The Lafayette Chamber of Commerce is offering a Social Media Workshop: 3 Easy Steps to Get Your Business and Website Found on Google, from 8 to 9 a.m. June 15. The free event will be held at the Lafayette Library and Learning Center, 3491 Mt. Diablo Blvd., Lafayette. Presented by the president of the Bay Area Search Engine Academy.

Coldwell Banker Snags Two New Associates in Orinda

Coldwell Banker Residential Brokerage, the leading provider of real estate services in the Bay Area, recently announced two new sales associates at its Orinda office.

Carrie Avila will specialize in residential sales in the Lamorinda area and surrounding cities and Carol Russell will specialize in residential sales in Contra Costa County and surrounding areas.

Prior to affiliating with Coldwell Banker Residential Brokerage, Avila worked as an author for four years and is a licensed attorney specializing in Criminal Law.

Russell previously worked at Maui Luxury Real Estate in Maui, Hawaii. Her responsibilities included real estate sales focusing on the Island of Oahu. Russell brings 13 years' experience specializing in residential and investment sales.



Carol Russell Photo provided

Mary H. Smith D.D.S. • Cecelia Thomas, D.D.S.
A Professional Corporation
Family & Cosmetic Dentistry
96 Davis Road, Suite 5 Orinda, 925.254.0824



Taking care of all dental needs for you and your family. Emphasizing cosmetic dentistry with implants, and Invisalign. Nitrous oxide is available. Consultations are complimentary. Dentistry with Excellence.

YOUR SMILE IS EVERYTHING

If you have a business brief to share, please contact storydesk@lamorindaweekly.com